



CHAIRMAN ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Opening Statement
Hearing: "Time to Pause the Reset?:
Defending U.S. Interests in the Face of Russian Aggression"
July 7, 2011

The Obama Administration came into office intending to "reset" the U.S.-Russia relationship. Their assumption was that the Bush Administration had needlessly antagonized Moscow with overly aggressive policies, and that a more conciliatory approach would produce Russian cooperation in a broad range of issues. To that end, the Obama Administration has offered one concession after another, but the concrete results have been meager at best.

Russian cooperation on Iran is usually cited as a major accomplishment. But other than agreeing not to block UN Security Council Resolution 1929, which Moscow insisted to be watered down, Russia's approach to Iran remains essentially unchanged, even as Iran accelerates its march toward a nuclear weapons capability.

Russia is also committed to stopping U.S. missile defense efforts. The Obama Administration has said that the recently ratified strategic arms control treaty known as New START places no restrictions on U.S. missile defense efforts. However, the Russian government has repeatedly stated that the treaty does, in fact, come with such restrictions, and has unambiguously stated that it will not honor the terms of the agreement if the U.S. proceeds with its plans.

Russian claims that U.S. missile defense efforts in Europe is a threat to their security, and we know that these claims are absurd on their face. Independent experts say that not only does the proposed system pose no threat but that it cannot do so, a fact that Russia's leadership is well aware of.

Russia's true motive is a political one, namely to divide NATO and to demonstrate to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that, despite their close alliance with the U.S., Moscow intends to retain a dominant influence over their affairs. This is how the governments and people in that region see it.

Putin's government claims a privileged position for Russia regarding the countries on or near its borders and has repeatedly used its muscle to enforce this assertion of rights. Moscow has exploited their dependence on Russian energy supplies – including oil, natural gas, and electricity – to pressure governments to accommodate Russian demands, going so far as to cut off supplies in the middle of winter.

When Estonia defied the demands of Russian officials not to relocate a Soviet memorial in its capital, a massive cyberattack was launched on that country, almost paralyzing it.

Worst of all, in 2008 Russia's long-standing efforts to reimpose its control over Georgia moved beyond sowing political and economic turmoil and promoting separatist movements to an all-out invasion of large parts of that American ally. The tepid U.S. response has set a dangerous precedent and convinced Moscow that it has little to worry about.

Moscow's actions have demonstrated the lengths it is prepared to take to assert its influence on an even larger scale, a fact that is especially troubling in light of Europe's growing dependence on Russian energy.

There are many other areas in which Russia still targets U.S. interests, such as its arms sales to the Chavez regime in Venezuela, but the list is too long to go into here.

So it appears that the benefits for the U.S. of the reset are few and far in between. But we have paid a high price for them. Last year's nuclear cooperation agreement with Russia was a gift, pure and simple. The U.S. market was opened to Russian nuclear companies, but U.S. companies will find no corresponding opportunities in that country, where they will be shut out by its state-owned nuclear monopolies. Russia did receive the U.S. seal of approval for its efforts to become the world's one-stop shop for all things nuclear. This reward was given even as Russia was continuing to assist Iran in its nuclear program.

The latest offer to Moscow is support for Russia's entry into the World Trade Organization. This, despite Russia's continuing refusal to clamp down on the massive piracy of American intellectual property, which is second in scale only to China's, and much of which occurs on state-owned property.

It also comes as the Russian government's abuses of human rights and brutal approach toward those seeking a truly democratic government in Russia have only worsened. After the Russian authorities broke up opposition protests in Moscow and St. Petersburg late last year, detaining scores of activists, Russia's Vladimir Putin stated that: "if [the protesters] demonstrate without permission, they'll take a cudgel to the head. That's all there is to it."

This disturbing statement underscores the brutal nature of the Russian government and its abusive treatment of anyone who challenges its policies. There has been a particularly shameful pattern of beatings and murders of journalists in Russia, and no one has been held accountable.

And in yet another effort to prevent the democratic opposition from participating in the upcoming parliamentary elections, the Kremlin has banned Boris Nemtsov, one of Russia's most prominent democratic leaders whom I met with last year, from leaving Russia again should he return from his current visit to France.

What have we bought for all of our concessions to Moscow? How many times do we have to relearn the painful lesson that aggressors cannot be bought off, that allies must not be abandoned, and that naively trusting our adversaries to do anything other than pursue their own interests will produce no other outcome than to needlessly sacrifice our interests and undermine our security?

It is my hope that the Administration will reconsider its approach to the Russian regime.

I now turn to the distinguished Ranking Member, Mr. Berman, for his opening remarks.